



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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TAKE BIG-GAME CENSUS FROM AIR; GET BETTER COUNT IN LESS TIME

Keeping up with the times, North Dakota's Game and Fish Commission has adopted the airplane as a means for making counts of the State's big-game populations, according to a Fish and Wildlife Service report to Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes.

As a part of a Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration project approved by the Service, the Commission tried out the idea this year. When an air observer counted 7,227 white-tailed deer, mule deer, and antelopes in less time and for less money than it previously had been done by a corps of 40 workers, Commissioner William J. Lowe said, "That's for us."

It all started because there was some discussion as to the number of big-game animals in North Dakota. This may not seem important to many people, but getting the facts is a headache if one happens to be the Game and Fish Commissioner who has to recommend hunting laws that will satisfy big-game hunters and yet keep the animal populations safe.

As soon as the Fish and Wildlife Service had approved the airplane census as part of the Pitman-Robertson Project, Commissioner Lowe hired a small airplane and a private pilot.

The plane observer came home with the bacon in the form of accurate information. "Never before has the State had adequate information on which to base its hunting regulations on big-game," Commissioner Low reported. "Now I believe few States have as accurate or complete a count as North Dakota has."

Commenting on the airplane technique, the Fish and Wildlife Service pointed out that, while it can be used effectively in the deciduous forested areas in North Dakota, it is not to be assumed that complete aerial big-game inventories can be taken elsewhere. In forests made up wholly or in part of evergreens this method is not adequate.

Survey Sixth of State Area

One-sixth of the total State area was surveyed from the air. This included all known big-game ranges. Illustrating how rapidly the air census is made as compared with ground estimates, Mr. Lowe said that 40 men spent nearly 1 day surveying an 800-acre area by the concentrated-drive method. This project cost \$120. The aerial survey covered the same 800-acre area in 8-1/2 minutes with greater accuracy at a cost of \$1 for plane and pilot.

Most of the 10,000-mile air count was made at an altitude of 376 feet. A special Federal permit had been issued for the purpose. Though this was over North Dakota's roughest and most dangerous terrain in the worst months of the year, January to March, there were no accidents or forced landings.

During the flight, the North Dakota observers learned that they could also take accurate counts of sharp-tailed grouse and Hungarian partridges, which flushed from cover when the plane approached.

Observers recognized many other species of animals. Pinnated grouse, ruffed grouse, pheasants, coyotes, foxes, wolves, eagles, owls, porcupines, and rabbits could be seen in the snow without the aid of binoculars.

The Game and Fish Commission expects to continue aerial surveys of big-game populations if a small plane is available next year.